

International Trade in Coral Reef Resources

Charge to the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force

Section 5(d) of Executive Order 13089 (Protection of Coral Reefs) concerns the duties of the Task Force to protect international coral reef resources. The charge of the Executive Order to the Task Force states: The Secretary of State and the Administrator of the Agency for International Development, in cooperation with other members of the Coral Reef Task Force and drawing upon their expertise, shall assess the U.S. role in international trade and protection of coral reef species and implement appropriate strategies and actions to promote conservation and sustainable use of coral reef resources worldwide. Such actions shall include expanded collaboration with other International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) partners, especially governments, to implement the ICRI through its Framework for Action and the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network at regional, national, and local levels.

Recommendation of the International Trade Subgroup

- Based upon actions taken at CITES, and the limitations of both CITES and voluntary certification programs to address the continuing concerns regarding unsustainable international trade in coral reef species, the Trade Subgroup requests that Task Force agencies address the concerns of unsustainable trade in coral reef resources, including drafting legislation on trade in coral reef species.

Background

- At the 8th meeting of the Task Force, in October 2002, a resolution was adopted that directed the Task Force agencies participating in the upcoming Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to use every opportunity to raise the issue of trade in coral reef species and its impacts on coral reefs. In addition, the Task Force directed:
 1. the Trade Subgroup of the Task Force's International Working Group to consider actions taken at that meeting, the prospects for future CITES actions based on their evaluation of the actions and discussions at this meeting, and the extent to which additional statutory authority to address problems with trade in coral reef species is necessary; and
 2. the Trade Subgroup and the International Working Group to report their recommendations to the Task Force at the next meeting.
- CITES is a successful international wildlife agreement that is legally binding on the Party countries, provides a framework and oversight mechanism for promoting legal and sustainable trade, and raises awareness about unsustainable international wildlife trade.
- Listing of species under CITES protection is a collaborative and lengthy process. Species are added to CITES in a piecemeal approach only after a country proposes the listing, including detailed population status and trade information, and after agreement by a two-thirds majority of the Party countries.
- CITES monitors international trade through a system of permits that imply legal and sustainable trade, and there are few means to question the scientific or legal findings

made by an exporting country. CITES allows Party countries to adopt stricter domestic laws to address specific problems, and several countries have adopted import permit requirements that allow them to make their own findings about legality and sustainability.

- CITES countries are required to establish their own sustainable management practices. Occasional reviews of these practices occur for species of concern but the process is lengthy and addresses limited numbers of species.
- At the CITES Conference in November 2002, the United States successfully listed 32 species of seahorses in Appendix-II, but was defeated in its efforts to list the humphead wrasse, one of the largest coral reef fishes that is heavily exploited for the live reef food fish trade.
- The United States introduced a discussion paper on sea cucumbers that led to agreement on a technical workshop to evaluate the conservation status of sea cucumbers and consider appropriate conservation measures, including regional management, domestic fisheries controls and a possible future CITES listing.
- The United States negotiated a joint proposal with Japan that led to agreement for development of a memorandum of understanding between CITES and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on fisheries issues, and the CITES countries agreed to adopt Appendix-II listings for the whale and basking sharks.
- The Trade Subgroup finds that CITES is a valuable tool for monitoring international trade in listed coral reef species. CITES cannot, however, address all the concerns raised regarding unsustainable international trade in coral reef species. The majority of coral reef species in trade are not listed on CITES and efforts to list species are long-term. In addition, review of sustainable management practices for scientific viability and effectiveness remains a lengthy process within CITES and must address over 23,000 species of plants and animals.
- The United States continues to support private efforts at developing certification programs for best practices in resource management, collection, handling and transport of coral reef species for the aquarium trade. Such certification is a powerful tool to promote long-term environmental and economic benefits and is valuable for addressing concerns regarding unsustainable trade in coral reef species.
- However, concerns regarding such certifications programs have emerged that include the amount of time required to implement the certification program on a scale large enough to address unsustainable trade issues, and due to the voluntary nature of certification, the potential for mixing of certified and uncertified organisms.
- The United States can help ensure success of such certification as an effective strategy to help reduce impacts of global trade by implementing complementary measures that prevent unsustainable harvest, import, and export of ornamental coral reef species.